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ABSTRACT

Two papers on developments toward consumerism in higher education are included. In "Alternatives to Federal Regulation of Consumer Information," by Joan S. Stark and Patrick T. Terenzini, several questions are posed for considering alternative systems to help students obtain and use information for college choice: (1) Can meaningful information guidelines be developed? (2) Will institutions cooperate in following them? and (3) Can a workable consumer assistance system be developed? Project CHOICE (Center for Helping Organizations Improve Choice in Education) is described, and the concept of Educational Information Centers, funded by the federal government, is outlined. In the second paper, "Consumerism in the Classroom: The Nebraska Experiment," Eugene P. Trani describes a program in six Nebraska universities and colleges entitled "Helping Students Become More Sophisticated Consumers of Their Own Education." The major component of the project is a course in learning analysis, intended to help students become more knowledgeable and analytical about their own learning reactions. The course is outlined, and some resulting experiences are noted. It is proposed that this project will not only assist students in getting the most out of their education, but will also encourage and assist in teaching improvement. (MSE)

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## NEW DIRECTIONS FOR THE STUDENT CONSUMER MOVEMENT

Joan S. Stark and Patrick T. Terenzini
Eugene Trani

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1978 National Conference Series, American Association for Higher Education

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# NEW DIRECTIONS FOR THE STUDENT CONSUMER MOVEMENT

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# ALTERNATIVES TO FEDERAL REGULATION OF CONSUMER INFORMATION

**Joan S. Stark and Patrick T. Terenzini**

## BACKGROUND

The types of information supplied to prospective students by colleges and universities have recently received considerable attention from outside the academic ommunity. Since 1975, when the need to account for student aid funds stimulated the Federal Interagency Committee on Education to label the postsecondary student a "consumer," the federal government has moved rapidly toward a centralized system intended to protect students from possibly misleading advertising by colleges and vocational schools. This new federal guardianship is lodged in eligibility requirements for participation in various student aid programs.

The call for more detailed information available prior to a student's enrollment in postsecondary education stems mainly from evidence that some financial aid recipients have made poor educational investments, ostensibly because they lacked adequate knowledge of the institution and its policies. Although the presumption that students will make wise investments if they possess certain types of information remains undemonstrated, the idea appeals to common sense and therefore has received wide acceptance.

Early assumptions concerning the items of information that might facilitate more rational student choices among educational opportunities were based on proprietary-school scandals involving federal loan defaults. These assumptions, now incorporated into law through the Education Amendments of 1976 and through rules promulgated by the Office of Education, the Veterans Administration, and, for proprietary institutions, the Federal Trade Commission, require institutions to supply specific types of information to applicants. Except for those rules that deal directly with financial aid information and costs of attendance, however, there is little evidence that the mandated items follow either from a knowledge of students' decision-making processes or from generally accepted educational principles. Rather, the emerging system for regulating student information appears to be based on the supposition that, given the opportunity, colleges will neglect student welfare in favor of increasing institutional enrollments. Colleges and vocational schools are believed to demonstrate little concern for helping students make sound educational choices.

Federal lawmakers have been, and continue to be, strongly encouraged in their move toward more detailed information by student lobby groups and consumer advocates. These well-intentioned organizations have seized an opportunity to press for a variety of favored reforms that can be linked to consumer information, ranging from pro rata refund policies to mandatory evaluation of faculty by students. Although the current regulations applying to colleges and universities do not specify the precise content or format of the required information, the distinct possibility exists that more detailed specifications will be forthcoming. Indeed, this prospect has become more potent with the introduction of a bill in the 1977 Congress which, had it not died in committee, would have placed colleges under the jurisdiction of the Federal Trade Commission.

State regulatory agencies and coordinating commissions, too, have begun to take a more active role in supervising the information colleges circulate. While some states, such as Oregon and Minnesota, have previously been involved in productive ventures to improve student choice, other states have acted belatedly to guard their traditional role as primary educational authorities from additional federal intrusion. One state, New York, has enacted the federal law nearly verbatim and has proposed considerably more detailed reporting formats for colleges. While these efforts have educational overtones, the student consumer information system that has begun to emerge at both state and federal levels is primarily intended to ensure that taxpayers' funds are spent for their intended purposes.

Collegiate institutions and their Washington representatives have been quick to criticize government initiatives and, in some cases, have successfully argued for a less stringent interpretation of the new laws than was originally contemplated. College representatives have protested that the new regulations are expensive, illegal, unfair, and interfere unduly in internal educational matters. Although most colleges admit that the information they provide might be expanded to help students make more informed decisions, the colleges themselves have so far done little to suggest constructive alternatives to the federal rules.

Perhaps the most valid argument against the new federal regulations is the one seldom heard —simply that the requirements do not provide a solution to the problems students face when choosing among colleges. The new rules will be ineffective, not because they are expensive, illegal, unfair, or intrusive, nor because the government has insufficient personnel for adequate enforcement. They will be ineffective precisely because in their present form they are unlikely to help students make better choices. Not only is much of the required information largely irrelevant to educational choice, but the rules provide neither for the encouragement of new attitudes among students and institutions, nor for the development of positive relationships that already exist.

Students should be encouraged to view their prospective colleges as sources of assistance in decisionmaking, rather than as adversaries, and to judge institutions on educationally relevant criteria. Colleges must see the required information in terms of their clear professional obligations to students and in terms of their potential for enhancing the educational process. Unfortunately, as the current pseudo-support system for students becomes entrenched, students may begin to judge what is educationally important in light of the regulations issued. Students may ignore advice crucial to sound educational decisions, while colleges may begin to develop policies and practices to meet only minimal compliance standards. For institutions, under such circumstances, the "standard" could become doing as little as possible. Thus, the present system, which has involved neither students nor colleges in its conception, is not only unworkable, but has dangerous implications for education.

The increasing size and complexity of institutions, unexamined tradition, encroaching bureaucracy, and escalating competition for students in recent years may have caused college concern for student decisions to be less obvious. But the threat of federal action has stimulated the discussion of alternative systems among colleges that are often slow to respond to changing times until external forces cause them to do so. Colleges are now conscious that they have not fully accepted the obligation of developing adequate information for prospective students.

There are many practical as well as educational reasons why colleges and universities desire to uphold standards of fair practice and academic integrity that far exceed the federal guidelines for supplying information to applicants. First, colleges are constantly studying their students and are best prepared to determine what information will be helpful to students in terms of each institution's unique environment. In a time of declining enrollments, colleges are anxious to maintain the public trust by accepting their responsibilities for assisting students. Second, there is considerable evidence that joint involvement of students and colleges in developing information materials given to prospective students can serve as an adaptive mechanism leading to institutional improvement. The concerted action of colleges and universities in providing better information for students is more likely to be cost-effective than the development of bureaucratic mechanisms for enforcing externally devised solutions.

To translate the good intentions of institutions into more fruitful advice for students, a "seller" and "consumer" *assistance* system, rather than an enforcement or protection system, is needed. Such a system must be based on obligations to students and on educational principles, rather than on vested interests and accountability requirements for federal funds. Colleges must assume the responsibility for describing the information most needed for students to make wise educational decisions, and for conveying to the public the importance of full use of the information in selecting among educational options. Such an assistance system must be developed through a process that is sufficiently flexible to evolve with changing times and conditions, and that uses the best knowledge of colleges and their students in a cooperative venture. Most importantly, the information development process must encourage attention to the clearer specification of educational outcomes, and to the evaluation and improvement of educational quality based on well-documented criteria rather than on isolated incidents of student complaints.[1] Few such constructive goals of a consumer assistance system for postsecondary education are likely to be met by federal or state rules that rest on threats and penalties rather than on positive incentives.

In considering alternative systems for assisting students in obtaining and using more adequate information for college choice, several important questions need to be answered, and several loci of responsibility might be identified as alternatives to further federal action. The questions include:

(1) Can clear guidelines be developed to characterize information that is necessary, useful and usable by prospective students of various ages and backgrounds in choosing among educa-

tional institutions?

(2) Will institutions cooperate in developing and adopting such guidelines and in determining appropriate roles for themselves and for government agencies?

(3) Can the guidelines, cooperative spirit among colleges, and efforts of the many responsible agencies be coordinated in a workable system that will use available resources, energies and concerns constructively?

(4) Can a system be structured that will distribute the responsibility for better educational information among agencies that deal with individuals at all levels of educational consideration, from childhood to adult?

## DEVELOPING MEANINGFUL INFORMATION GUIDELINES

Substantial progress has been made in determining what information is useful to students in decisionmaking. From 1975-1977, eleven postsecondary institutions and four resource agencies, constituted as a National Task Force on Better Information for Student Choice, cooperated in exploring this question. They conducted national and local surveys of student information needs, related these to information that educators and students on campuses felt was important, attempted to develop the needed information for each institution, and experimented with the format that might make the data most useful to students.[2] A somewhat similar project was conducted by the Virginia State Council for Higher Education during the same time period.

As a result of these studies, it is now clear that prospective postsecondary students value information that they believe is not presently available, including more complete financial aid information, detailed descriptions of instructional programs and teaching effectiveness, and the relation of education to future careers. It is also known that certain types of students, such as minorities and adults, have specific concerns often unaddressed by general information. Differences in the kinds of information that are most useful to students in considering institutions of diverse types have also been clarified.

Students do not, at present, view the proportion of entering students who complete programs at the institution as important in their considerations, nor are they particularly interested in reports of the experiences of enrolled students in many areas of campus life. Some educators, in contrast, recognize that student experiences do not always coincide with written policies and believe that students should be encouraged to consider both stated policies and behavioral reports from representative samples of enrolled students. As one Task Force member put it, for any given program or educational activity, applicants should know "How many students participate? To what effect? And what opinion have they of it afterward?"[3] In keeping with this view, the Better Information Task Force attempted to develop information to help students answer the question: "What is likely to happen to me if I enroll at this institution?" The information developed included clearer statements of policies, data that indicated actual student experiences, and reports of student views of college programs and services.

Although student self-reported needs can now be summarized with some accuracy, subject to institutional and personal variations, further research is needed to determine whether supplying this desired information or information viewed as important by educators or government officials will influence student decisions. Until such research has been conducted, the definition of "better information" will continue to be unclear and must include those items considered important by all three groups. Only continued cooperation among colleges in determining the impact of information when it is supplied to applicants can support a rationale for providing one type of information over another. Although the understanding of what information will help students make better decisions among colleges has taken quantum leaps in the past three years, much work remains to be done before colleges can claim to have fulfilled their responsibility in taking a leadership role in the information issue.

## WILL INSTITUTIONS COOPERATE?

The work of the National Task Force on Better Information for Student Choice illustrates one type of cooperation. The member institutions jointly addressed issues of student information needs and delivery and modified basic components of their information systems in an effort to facilitate students' selection of a college. In general, however, each institution examined the

information needs of its own applicants and constructed its own responses. Although the sharing of ideas was fruitful, no concerted effort was made in this preliminary venture to develop consistency in the types of information provided by the various schools and colleges participating.[4] Only near the conclusion of the project was sufficient evidence available to discuss meaningfully some of the types of information that are most important and might be developed in a consistent way to foster improved student choice.[5] Even at that time, it was clear that the importance of information varied with the type of college and final agreements would be difficult to achieve.

### Project CHOICE

A new Center for Helping Organizations Improve Choice in Education (CHOICE) is now building on this early work by extending the guidelines begun by the Task Force and encouraging institutions to become involved in a cooperative project that will include both attempts to develop comparable information and a research design to determine whether the information influences student views. Although institutions involved in this new cooperative project will receive technical assistance, collegial support and data analysis services, they will be responsible (unlike the Task Force institutions) for funding the new information development on their own campuses after they reach agreements with similar colleges about ventures that might be tried cooperatively. Although only twenty institutions will be selected for the cooperative project in 1978-79, a linking consultant service will extend the activities to a much larger group of colleges during 1979-80.

Initial response to the CHOICE project indicates strong interest among colleges in facing the problem of better information for students. During the first six weeks of publicity, which reached 3200 collegiate institutions, approximately one-eighth took time to respond to a survey assessing their knowledge of the better information issue and soliciting information about activities on their campuses. During the same time period, about 150 colleges contacted CHOICE concerning participation in its cooperative project. These results indicate that colleges are generally aware of public concern for better information and are actively engaged in considering appropriate responses.

The strategy used by CHOICE to encourage colleges to develop better information cooperatively represents a radical departure from both the manner in which federal regulations were introduced and from similar dissemination and development projects in higher education. Perhaps most importantly, the usual funding incentives will not be provided to participating colleges. The CHOICE plan assumes that colleges will accept the challenge and responsibility of beginning to provide consistent information that is educationally meaningful, in order that new information systems can be structured on sound knowledge of student needs. In addition, CHOICE has based its activities on principles of organizational development and adoption of new ideas: the organization must see the relative advantages of the new approach over customary practice, be able to observe the results obtained by others who have adopted the new idea, find the new approach compatible with its goals and standards, view the new approach as reasonably simple to introduce in a limited setting, be able to obtain necessary assistance, and be able to implement the new idea on a pilot basis without major organizational restructuring.[6] These guidelines assume a willingness of colleges that possess substantial motivation to improve information for students to provide leadership for other institutions.

## TOWARD A CONSUMER-ASSISTANCE SYSTEM

The agencies that might take primary responsibility for developing an effective consumer assistance system are numerous. They include: (a) the higher education associations and accreditors, traditionally the standard bearers for colleges; (b) a voluntary educational service utility, such as the College Board; (c) state agencies already involved in collecting and disseminating educational information; and (d) a new type of agency acceptable to both colleges and governmental bodies that would exercise responsibility and provide leadership. The three types of existing agencies mentioned above have, to some extent, been involved already.

For example, the American Council on Education has already urged colleges and universities to examine their information practices in light of changing times and new public demands.[7] In cooperation with the Council on Postsecondary Accreditation, ACE has been drafting a code of good practice for institutions in the areas of information and other college-student relationships. This code will increase consciousness of long-accepted responsibilities and is another step in a

cooperative direction by established groups that already have the respect and support of colleges.

Several state-level efforts now underway epitomize the type of concern for students information necessary in a workable system. Some of these projects have successfully involved colleges in their planning and execution of state-wide education directories. Oregon's educational and career information system is now being used as a model for an eight-state pilot project in occupational information; at the same time, New York is testing the usefulness of public libraries for supplying information to prospective students.

The College Board, the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, and the Education Commission of the States all participated in the National Task Force on Better Information and have disseminated their findings about better information for students. As non-profit educational service agencies with considerable experience in college choice, one of these agencies could assume a leadership role; however, their efforts might be hampered by the strong feeling of students that they respond more to college interests than to student interests.

A potentially useful mechanism not now in existence might be a state agency that would allow constructive interaction between colleges and government, and that would have both a flexible service orientation to students and a broad-based governing arrangement involving all interested parties in policy formulation. The primary criterion of success for such a system is that student counseling become a primary and positive focus.

The work now being undertaken by CHOICE may lay the groundwork for such a model, since 1) It involves the institutions directly in a self-improvement effort that is based on educational concerns; 2) It fosters direct student involvement on each campus where those enrolled can be most effective in helping prospective students; and 3) It serves as a communication link between private and governmental agencies. A new system might merge the firm knowledge base and cooperative spirit among institutions that CHOICE is building with the concerns of state and federal authorities, as well as with the concerns of students, in a way that remains neutral and helpful.

**Educational Information Centers**

One role CHOICE will play is that of stimulating thinking about that kind of integrated system among both institutions and governmental groups. A current possibility to be carefully considered is the newly proposed Educational Information Center system. At the same time that Congress adopted its regulatory approach to student information in the Education Amendments of 1976, it provided an opportunity for states to accept more responsibility for informing students about postsecondary opportunities. Congress authorized Educational Information Centers (EICs), to be funded jointly by the states and the federal government, and to be established within commuting distance of citizens in every state that submits a comprehensive plan for their establishment. Although the EIC mission is to provide educational information, counseling, and referral services regarding postsecondary education, the manner in which this will be accomplished and the sources of the information have not yet been defined. Since they are as yet unformed and unfettered by tradition or obligations to any institutional constituency, Educational Information Centers have great potential for creating a consumer assistance system.[8]

In late February, 1978, personnel charged with the responsibilities of planning for the EICs in over forty states met in Denver under the auspices of the Education Commission of the States, the College Board, the Institute for Educational Leadership, and the National Center for Educational Brokering. Topics of discussion included existing and potential models that could be used for or incorporated into the EICs, including state-wide telephone networks, computerized career information systems, adult community-counseling centers, and existing library units. The conference aimed to develop state-wide plans that would embody various functions necessary for adequate dissemination of educational information, particularly to adult learners. But with the exception of discussion about the data bases from which a computerized system can be constructed, little attention was given to the types, sources, or accuracy of information to be disseminated. Almost no mention was made of involving educational institutions in the activities of the proposed EICs.

Although the initial thrust of the EICs will undoubtedly be on collecting and dispensing information now available, the Centers might also undertake the types of activities for which CHOICE is building models. The EICs, if properly staffed, could be involved in the continuous process of determining what information is essential to students of various types, in assisting col-

leges to develop that information through on-campus efforts, in investigating the impact of the information on students, and in peer monitoring of the types of information being supplied by institutions.

Although the idea of supplying comparable information on a state-wide basis is more acceptable to colleges than a federal system, and while students are more likely to develop a sense of their own responsibility if the EICs take on a counseling thrust, the mistakes evident in the initial federal moves toward better information for student consumers should not be repeated as the EICs develop. Well-structured plans that involve the interest of colleges themselves in better student choice are essential to the long-range success of a new educational advisory system.

To date, many colleges and universities are unaware of planning efforts for Educational Information Centers in their states. High school guidance counselors have not been asked to contribute the knowledge and experience they have acquired over many years of counseling students about postsecondary opportunities. Yet, the involvement of these groups in the cooperative setting of standards of comprehensiveness and accuracy in the information to be disseminated is crucial. The emergence of a new setting for disseminating information facilitates use of the best knowledge about producing attitude change among students and institutions, and for creating a system that can respond to changing needs. Such knowledge must, however, be consciously employed.

If colleges do not participate in developing these important centers, their current interest in supplying improved information will not be used to best advantage; errors already entrenched in the federal information regulations may be compounded, and educators in traditional institutions may place limited value on the new information centers as aids in their work.

The public demand for accountability in providing information to prospective students and the provision for new agencies to serve this function imply that the professional obligation of colleges has not been met. At the same time, it is inappropriate for the Educational Information Centers to meet a public need for neutral information merely by dispensing those data published by institutions and commercial agencies without concern for their accuracy or their helpfulness to students. Similarly, it is important that colleges and universities not abandon a potential leadership role in the continual improvement of information for students, either because the counseling function has been assumed by an external agency or because they have met the letter of the law. The best thinking and commitment of all involved segments of the educational and governmental communities are necessary for an effective consumer-assistance system in postsecondary education.

## FOOTNOTES

[1]The characteristics of such a system are given in more detail in *The Many Faces of Educational Consumerism* by Joan S. Stark and Associates, Lexington, Mass.: D.C. Heath, Inc., 1977, p. 201.

[2]A report of the Task Force's activities and a handbook illustrating and analyzing its products was published by the American Association for Higher Education in early 1978.

[3]Theodore J. Marchese. "Better Information for Student Choice: The Basic Argument." Address delivered at the National Conference on Better Information for Student Choice, Washington, D.C., March, 1977.

[4]A major exception was a group of institutions, working under the guidance of the College Scholarship Service, that agreed upon guidelines for presenting financial aid information consistently. See *Making It Count*, College Entrance Examination Board, 1977.

[5]For a discussion of such items, see "Providing Comparable Information to Prospective Students," by O. T. Lenning, J. S. Stark, and P. Wishart. Working paper available from CHOICE, 227 Huntington Hall, Syracuse University.

[6]See E. N. Rogers and F. F. Shoemaker, *Communication of Innovations: A Cross Cultural Approach. New York: Free Press, 1971.*

[7]See *New Expectations for Fair Practice*, by Elaine H. El-Khawas, distributed free by the American Council on Education.

[8]Variations on this idea are found in Stark, *op. cit.*

Joan S. Stark
Dean, School of Education
University of Michigan
Corner East and South University Avenues
Ann Arbor, MI 48109

Patrick T. Terenzini
Graduate Student
Syracuse University
Syracuse, NY 13204

## CONSUMERISM IN THE CLASSROOM: THE NEBRASKA EXPERIMENT

**Eugene P. Trani**

Some educators are reluctant to use the word "consumer" in regard to students. In fact, there has been resistance to the idea of student consumerism by those who point out that education is not a consumer item like a car or a haircut. One commentator has noted:

> There are serious drawbacks to an imagery based on students as consumers or receivers of an educational product or service. In large measure, consumerist rhetoric conjures up an image of unwitting victims pitted against unscrupulous villains bent on gaining a quick profit. The reality of post-secondary study is much different: Students are active participants in the learning process, not passive recipients of a service. A specific product cannot be expected; although the institution can provide opportunities for learning, the result for any particular student depends heavily on individual interest and effort. And most institutions conscientiously seek to provide good instructional and other services, even if actual performance falls short of that mark.[1]

These objections notwithstanding, the student consumer movement continues to grow. A recent editorial in *Change* magazine summarized the developments in student consumerism. The students are older, more experienced, and have a greater sense of a right "to be informed of the facts of what they are buying for their education dollars, a right they hold as unassailable as that of breathing reasonably unpolluted air."[2]

The consumer movement has had considerable success in the area of better information for students. The student consumer information sections of the Education Amendments of 1976, which became effective July 1, 1977, require accurate disclosure by educational institutions on such items as financial assistance, instructional programs, refund policies, estimated costs, facilities, faculty, student retention, and employment prospects.[3] These amendments insure the participation of the federal government in fostering consumerism among students, even if the exact effects of the amendments as yet remain unclear.

Most of the current efforts for student consumer protection have concentrated on the areas of the recruitment of students, the advertising of academic institutions, financial policies, admission and graduation standards, and opportunities for employment upon graduation. Very little of the consumer movement has entered the classroom itself.

### THE NEBRASKA PROJECT

How can the concept of consumerism enter the classroom without upsetting the delicate balance between student and faculty rights? One such attempt is currently taking place in Nebraska.

Six Nebraska universities and colleges are currently involved in a three-year project—supported in part by the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education—entitled "Helping Students Become More Sophisticated Consumers of Their Own Education." This project brings consumerism into the classroom. The participating institutions represent a diverse group of public and private, large and small schools noted for their interest and activities in student and faculty development. They are Chadron State College, the College of Saint Mary, Doane College, Kearney State College, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, and the University of Nebraska at Omaha. Originally conceived by K. Patricia Cross, the project is being coordinated by the University of Nebraska.

The major component of the project is a course in learning analysis. This course is intended to help students—primarily freshmen—become more knowledgeable and analytical about their own learning reactions. It begins by inviting students to explore their own approaches to learning through a set of measures of cognitive style. The introductory unit of the learning analysis course also includes a survey of the principles of learning and a discussion of various teaching models.

The introductory unit of the course is followed by a series of content units (of three or four weeks duration) taught by outstanding instructors from different disciplines using different teaching techniques, such as the self-paced instruction, experiential learning, gaming and simulation, lecture-demonstration, discovery, and open classroom methods. During these content units,

students keep track of their learning reactions, analyze their responses to the teaching method, and learn the disciplinary content of each unit.

Desired student outcomes from the course include knowledge of one's preferred learning style and of the teaching-learning environments in which various strategies are optimally used; knowledge of how to adapt to non-preferred learning situations; experience with a variety of teaching methods; and introductory knowledge about the psychology of learning and several other disciplines.

Faculty development is also facilitated by the learning analysis course. Distinguished teaching faculty from different disciplines, who use different teaching mthods, have the opportunity to share perspectives and to learn from each other, as well as to interact with students reflecting upon the teaching-learning process. In addition, the course provides an on-campus laboratory for faculty interested in expanding their teaching repertoires.

The learning analysis course and the project of which it is a part result from a conviction that even though college students have had at least twelve years of experience as "consumers" of education, most remain remarkably unsophisticated about what constitutes a good learning experience. In fact, most have given little thought to their own individual learning styles. Yet, increasingly, students are called upon to evaluate the effectiveness of teaching and to assume more responsibility for their own lifelong learning.

**Project Goals**

The goal of the Nebraska project is to improve both teaching and learning by helping students become more sophisticated consumers of their own education. In education, as in the larger society, there is reason to believe that consumers who know what they want will be highly effective in getting it.

Although students and faculty share responsibility for the effectiveness of the teaching-learning process, most of the current attention on the instructional process is directed toward "faculty development" and the "improvement of instruction." These efforts to improve the teaching side of the equation are faced with some common obstacles. The first hurdle is to gain recognition for the problem.

To date, campus approaches to raising faculty awareness have consisted largely of activities such as workshops, discussions of rewards for improved teaching, faculty senate resolutions and policy statements, administrative statements regarding the importance of teaching to the institution, and distinguished teaching awards—with attendant publicity. Most colleges and universities also provide offices for the improvement of instruction. Such offices, however, usually attract only a small minority of faculty members to their services, and on most campuses today, there is no feeling on the part of the *majority* of faculty that the improvement of teaching is a high-priority item on their institution's agenda.[4]

One might argue that since teachers appear satisfied, perhaps the need for improvement is not as great as many think it is. There is evidence to refute such a simplistic answer. Research has shown that some of the new teaching strategies result in significantly improved learning for some students, and there is evidence that the improvement of teaching performance is possible.[5]

There is also a need to help students analyze what is good learning experience for them. If students are knowledgeable about various teaching alternatives and analytical about what methods work for them, they are likely to help create the first condition for change—faculty awareness of the expectations of knowledgeable learners. Faculty, thus, do not bear the full responsibility for the improvement of the teaching-learning process. Students themselves can assume more responsibility for the effectiveness of learning. There is some danger that in the present enthusiasm for *faculty* development, students may become the passive observers of efforts to improve instruction, and they may come to consider themselves the lofty judges of teaching performance, instead of equal partners in the teaching-learning process.

As lifelong learning plays an increasingly critical role in American life, it is also important that students learn something about the activity involved in learning and about their own cognitive styles and preferences. Increasingly, learners will be called on to make choices from an array of nontraditional alternatives—offered not only by established educational institutions, but by industry, government, community agencies, and communications media. Learning how to learn and to

make the diagnoses and selections that serve needs at a particular time may be one of the most important lessons that colleges can teach. The Nebraska project is attempting to come to grips with the problem of educating students for a lifetime of continuous learning.

Another problem area that exists in most improvement of teaching projects concerns the evaluation of effective teaching. There are charges that students are not always competent to evaluate teaching—that charismatic lecturers have an advantage in the ratings and that high graders are rated higher than low graders. In addition, some professors complain that teacher-evaluation forms are designed for traditional courses, and the innovator is penalized for offering instruction that cannot be adequately evaluated through present methods. There are elements of truth to these claims, and thus the problem of credibility of student ratings remains an issue with many faculty members.[6] There is also a concern that the overemphasis on the action of *teaching* is underplaying the role of the action of *learning*.

The Nebraska project is asking students to rate their learning reactions rather than the quality of teaching, thereby confronting the student with a task for which he or she is uniquely qualified. Moreover, attention becomes focused where it should be—on the activity of learners rather than teachers—thereby rewarding attempts on the part of professors to experiment with better ways of presenting their material, and minimizing the temptation for immature learners to give high ratings to classes that make fewer demands on them. Since student learning is the ultimate criterion of teaching effectiveness, the use of student-learning scales, which are being developed as part of the Nebraska project, will not only assist faculty members in analyzing their teaching effectiveness, but will also assist students in optimizing their individual approaches to learning.

Another problem addressed by the Nebraska project concerns student choices of alternative instructional methods. Once students become knowledgeable consumers of education, they must be provided with adequate information about possible learning alternatives. In recent years, student ratings of courses and instructors have been made public in many colleges and universities. The rationale is that students should be able to choose the "best" courses. But research has shown over the years that there probably is no "best" way to teach or to learn; a method that proves useful for one student may not be helpful to another. Consumers have different needs at different times and in different subjects. The Nebraska project is attempting to prepare students to analyze different teaching methods so that they may, whenever possible, select the method that suits their needs at the time.

**The Course in Learning Analysis**

A course in learning analysis was offered for the first time during the spring semester, 1977, at the University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO). The UNO teacher-demonstrators include faculty members in the English, Mathematics, Physics, and Speech Departments. The four teaching techniques illustrated at UNO are the discovery, experiential, lecture-demonstration, and open-classroom techniques. At the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, (UN-L), which began to offer learning analysis during the fall semester, 1977, the teacher-demonstrators include faculty members in the Folklore, Geography, Political Science, and Psychology Departments. The four teaching techniques illustrated are the experiential, gaming and simulation, Keller Plan, and lecture methods. Learning analysis is being offered for the first time at Chadron State College and Kearney State College during the spring 1978 semester, and the teaching techniques illustrated at those institutions include the discovery, computer-assisted instruction, small group interaction, gaming and simulation, lecture, and Keller Plan methods. The College of Saint Mary and Doane College will offer learning analysis beginning with the 1978 fall semester.

The final exams in the learning analysis course ask students to apply their knowledge of cognitive styles in analyzing the advantages and disadvantages of various learning situations for different kinds of learners, including themselves. Students also analyze the types of accommodations a student might make in non-preferred learning situations. The fall 1977 semester learning analysis finals at the University of Nebraska at Omaha and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln indicate that most students are able to identify appropriately their preferred cognitive learning styles and the teaching methods that permit them to maximize their performance and enjoyment. Additionally, the final exams indicate that students are aware of a variety of information-seeking strategies they may use to find out how a course will be taught, so that they may enroll in preferred learning environments. They are also aware of techniques for avoiding non-preferred learning environments and, to a lesser extent, for adapting their learning strengths to non-preferred

settings. In providing a self-analysis of preferred and non-preferred learning situations, for example, many UNO students noted that they were uncomfortable with the lack of structure and absence of articulated goals in the open-classroom environment; they preferred the structure provided by the lecture-demonstration format and the social experiences and mutually reinforced group learning occurring in the experiential format. These preferences are consistent with the generally field-dependent cognitive style of the UNO learning analysis group. Field-dependent students have been described as preferring socially oriented subject matter to objective or scientific materials, as holistic rather than analytic thinkers, as tending to be guided by authority figures, and as preferring to work with others rather than independently. The UNO students' preference for organizational structure and for interactive group experience is thus consistent with their field dependence.

Students enrolled in learning analysis last fall at both undergraduate campuses of the University of Nebraska appear to be typical of the student bodies there. The course attracts primarily freshmen (89% and 74% at UNO and UN-L respectively), who are largely undeclared in terms of majors (41% at UNO and 48% at UN-L had declared their majors at the time they enrolled in the course). In terms of cognitive-style test data, the students also appear typical of the college population. They are more field dependent than independent and seem more interested in the social sciences than the natural sciences and mathematics.

AT UNO, 261 students enrolled in the course during the first two semesters it was offered, with 185 completing the course for credit. Of the students who took learning analysis during the 1977 fall semester at UNO, the overwhelming majority report they would take it again (80%), would recommend it to their friends (94%), and felt it was a worthwhile learning experience (99%). The majority of those UNO students also report that the experience has affected their planning in selecting future courses (63%) and in seeking information as to the method of instruction utilized in individual course (66%). At UNO, as can be seen, the learning analysis course seems to have facilitated more informed academic planning by students.

Additionally, some UNO students reports an increased interest in the disciplines included in learning analysis (24 to 74%, depending on the content unit), with negligible declines in interest in those disciplines (2 to 8%). This increased interest in a broader spectrum of disciplines from the time the students entered the course is an unexpected side benefit.

Finally, students report that often they have few real choices in instructor or teaching method. At UNO, for example, 71% of a representative sample of the student body say that over 50% of their class choices are predetermined by their major. This situation makes the coping strategies explored in learning analysis even more important, especially if it can help students present possible instructional modifications to their instructors.

The impact on faculty members from participation in the course has also been considerable. The two major types of impact have come from association with colleagues from other disciplines who use different teaching techniques and from involvement with freshman students who are exploring their possibilities as learners. Although the team members have learned about each other's teaching techniques, their principal growth has been in appreciation of each other's different values regarding what is important to learn and how it may best be learned. The openness and honesty that is emerging among members of disciplines who would otherwise have little contact is encouraging. Likewise, their appreciation for the difficulty of freshman transitions to college and for students' values as compared to the traditional academic values is leading to an increased focus on students as individual learners.

These are only preliminary results; more analysis of the information collected from the students is currently taking place. A technical report on the course will be available in the near future.

**Problems Encountered**

There are problems that have arisen with the project. To begin with, the learning analysis course is expensive to implement and to maintain, as it involves four or five faculty members who teach it as part of their regular course load. This means a substantial commitment on the part of institutions offering learning analysis, a commitment that some institutions might not be willing or able to make, especially in an era of tight resources.

Additionally, the enrollments in the course have varied greatly from campus to campus, further accenting the cost required to deliver the course on some of the campuses. While more

than 500 students have enrolled in the three semesters it has been offered, the bulk of the enrollment has been at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, where the course is very successfully established. On the other three campuses currently offering a learning analysis course, enrollments have been less than expected, although there are explanations for the enrollment difficulties encountered. The fact that it is an elective course at most of the participating institutions and the lack of sympathy among some faculty members and some student advisers for innovative programs are just two of the reasons. Whatever the explanations, schools considering offering a similar course must be aware of the possibility of enrollment problems that generally seem to plague such innovative programs.

Further, the course can vary greatly in its focus, depending on the team members and the campus climate toward innovation. The four learning analysis teams vary from being student centered to being too concerned with disciplinary content. Learning Analysis utilizes academic disciplines to illustrate different teaching methods, but team members have to work very hard to keep that perspective.

Because of these problems, non-participating institutions may want to consider alternate ways of implementing a learning analysis course. Learning analysis could be offered as a one- or two-credit-hour course, without the content units. In this model, students could use concurrent course experiences as the basis for exploring their learning reactions with an instructor trained in cognitive styles. The emphasis of such a course, which would be considerably less costly than the model being followed in the Nebraska project, could be on adapting to non-preferred settings, discussing possible "coping" strategies, trying them out, and planning future academic programs. This abbreviated version of the course might also be offered through teaching and learning centers or continuing education programs. Yet another alternative is to offer learning analysis as part of new student orientation programs, rather than as a course. In such a model, students could be offered workshops that would help them identify their own preferred learning styles.

However the concept is delivered, those of us involved with the Nebraska project remain convinced that it is important for students to learn how they learn and to utilize this information in planning their academic programs.

**SUMMARY**

The Nebraska project addresses some common problems and suggests possible solutions. The following brief statements of the problems being addressed by the Nebraska project are followed by notations of the attempted solution.

(1) Faculty should recognize that present teaching methods may not be effective for many students. (Students are helped to analyze their learning reactions to various teaching strategies and to communicate their reactions to teachers.)

(2) The closed classroom door must be opened so that faculty may observe alternative teaching methods used by successful colleagues. (An open-demonstration laboratory has been created in which students and outstanding teachers are studying and experimenting with effective teaching-learning strategies.)

(3) Students must become prepared for their role as lifelong learners by gaining more insight into their individualistic learning styles and reactions to various teaching approaches. (The course in learning analysis helps students to become self-analytical regarding their learning processes.)

(4) Students must be able to choose learning options on the basis of information about the learning situation. Present instructor ratings provide majority judgments (i.e., "good," "poor") that are inadequate to guide the student in making wise consumer choices regarding personal needs. (Students learn how to seek information about the teaching methods used in courses offered at participating institutions.)

(5) The present emphasis on *faculty* development fails to articulate the teaching-learning equation in which faculty and students *share* the responsibility for the improvement of teaching and learning. (Faculty and students are brought together in the course on learning analysis to jointly study learner reactions to various teaching approaches.)

(6) The present student ratings of faculty performance tend to cast students into the role of "judge." Certain problems with those judgments cause credibility problems with some faculty

members. (Student *learning* scales are being developed, which will enable students to judge the effectiveness of teaching by rating the extent and quality of their own learning rather than by serving as observers and judges of teachers and their effectiveness.)

The quality of teaching and learning implies responsibilities on the part of *both* students and faculty. The essence of the Nebraska project is that students hold an important and heretofore ignored key to the improvement of teaching and learning. If the project can help students become more analytical observers of their own learning reactions, they will not only assume more responsibility for the quality of their learning, but they will be able to improve the quality of teaching, monitor their learning reactions to various teaching strategies, become more knowledgeable consumers of education, and become more competent evaluators of teaching effectiveness.[7]

It is clear that, in the years ahead, there will be a greater consumer orientation toward education, especially at a time when education is no longer a seller's market in which students feel grateful for educational opportunities. Now, when postsecondary education is viewed by students and society alike as a right rather than a privilege, the institutions have to be concerned with the desires of students. As a result, consumerism in education will grown.

Taking consumerism into the classroom, through such concepts as learning analysis, rather than suing professors for lack of performance, may prove to be a clear step forward.[8]

**FOOTNOTES**

[1]E. H. El-Khawas, "Putting the Student Consumer in Perspective," *Educational Record,* vol. 58, pp. 169-170, Spring, 1977.

[2]G. W. Bonham, "Consumer Information and Student Choice," *Change,* vol. 9, pp. 10-11, May, 1977. The best overall treatment of the student consumer movement can be found in J. S. Stark, ed., *Promoting Consumer Protection for Students.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc., 1976.

[3]Education Amendments of 1976, Public Law 94-482, 12 October 1976, ss. 1001 90 Stat. 2081.

[4]See, for example, K. P. Cross, *Report to the Faculty of the University of Nebraska: Results of the Faculty Survey on Teaching and Learning.* Lincoln, NE.: University of Nebraska, 1976, p. 6.

[5]B. S. Bloom, "Mastery Learning," in J. H. Block, ed. *Mastery Learning: Theory and Practice.* New York: Holt, 1971; J. A. Kulik and C. C. Kulik, "Effectiveness of the Personalized System of Instruction," *Engineering Education,* vol. 66, pp. 228-231, December, 1975; D. W. Allen and K. Ray, *Microteaching.* Menlo Park, CA.: Addison-Wesley, 1969; G. M. Gazda, et. al. *Human Relations Development: A Manual for Educators.* Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1973; J. A. Centra, "Effectiveness of student feedback in modifying college instruction," *Journal of Educational Psychology,* vol. 65, pp. 395-401, December, 1973.

[6]J. A. Centra, "Self-ratings of college teachers: a comparison with student ratings," *Research Bulletin* RB-72-33. Princeton, N.J.: Educational Testing Service, 1972; N. L. Gage, "Student's ratings of college teaching: their justification and proper use," in N. S. Glasman and B. R. Killait, eds. *Second UCSB Conference on Effective Teaching.* Santa Barbara, CA.: 1974, pp. 72-86; J. A. Kulik and W. J. McKeachie, "The evaluation of teachers in higher education," Mimeographed paper. Ann Arbor, MI. University of Michigan, 1974.

[7]More detail on student consumerism and on the rationale of the Nebraska project is contained in Eugene Trani, K. Patricia Cross, Steven B. Sample, and John Wiltse, "College and University Teaching and the Adult Consumer: Toward a More Sophisticated Student Body," *IEEE Proceedings* (forthcoming, September, 1978, in a special issue on education).

[8]For further information on the Nebraska project, please contact Dr. Eugene Trani, Assistant Vice President for Academic Affairs and Project Director, University of Nebraska, 3835 Holdrege Street, Lincoln, Nebraska 68583.

Eugene P. Trani
Assistant Vice President for Academic Affairs
and Project Director
The University of Nebraska
3835 Holdrege Street
Lincoln, NE 68583

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